

Jacob Leicht

CELESTE LERAY-LEICHT'S VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT

EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

Jacob's story needs to be told to help shed some light on our loss:

Jacob Paul Benjamin Leicht was born February 14, 1999; the namesake of his grandfathers. Jacob brought our family closer together from the moment of conception. He was my first baby and the first baby born on my side of the family. His little being brought intense joy to our home and to each and every family member on both sides.

As a first-time mom, I didn't want to miss anything that had to do with Jacob. Our hearts were connected with heartstrings. I took him everywhere and anywhere when he was a baby. He was my little sidekick. Sometimes my husband and I argued over whose turn it was to hold him, even though I never left Jacob's side for the first 6 months of his life.

Jacob had this massive grin and always had a twinkle in his eye. He had a happy spirit – a very pleasant disposition. He walked at a very early age and got into everything. He was sheer fun!

He was ferociously protective of his siblings. As baby #2 and 3 came, he would help look after them and give me heck if they cried and I didn't pick them up right away. By the time Karysa, our 4th and youngest, came, Jacob had just turned 7 years old. He had such a grown up way about him. He was so very gentle and mature with his littlest sister and I came to rely on him to pick her up and tend to her needs allowing me to tend to the needs of all of the family.

Jacob loved to play. He loved playing everything and anything with all his heart. He loved the outdoors and nature; he was musical, artistic, athletic, academic. Above all that and more importantly, he was kind and soft-spoken. He had a deep, quiet faith. He was chosen to play for the Broncos because of his skill and character.

Jacob cherished his relationships and never complained about anyone. He had the good judgement to know what it meant to be a friend and not compromise his own values. He never complained about teachers or coaches. If he had issues, we never heard about them, he worked through them on his own. He accepted people as they were and treated everyone with respect. His teachers often commented on how inclusive he was and could easily work with anyone he was assigned to work with. He was a role-model human being, whom I will always admire and appreciate knowing.

Jacob cared about his marks in school and was a self-motivated student. His diligence and intelligence were reflected in his marks at school. Jacob completed a university class at St. Peter's College last fall after his high school graduation while starting up his rookie year of Junior A hockey. He took a kinesiology class and loved it. On April 4, 2018, we researched osteopathy programs in North America because he was feeling that he benefitted so much from receiving osteopathic treatment in recent years that he took an interest in it as a career choice. He felt that something sports-related that would allow him to put both his mind and body to use would be a good fit. His dream was to pursue a hockey scholarship at a university.

Jacob met Kayleigh Feschuk from Prince Albert through friends he met while attending school and playing hockey during his grade 12 year. Their young love was remarkable and sweet. Their

relationship also became part of Jacob's dream. Kayleigh remains a part of the family and always will. Jacob chose wisely. We would have loved having Kayleigh as a daughter-in-law one day.

Jacob had become a young man who could sit and have a mature conversation with me. He had outgrown the phase that often accompanies teenagers who don't have much interest in their parents' lives. He hugged his loved ones freely and without reservation no matter who was around. I miss his teasing, his infectious laugh and his smiling eyes. He was respectful and a contributing member to society. I miss him every second of every day.

I could go on and on and on, as mothers can about their children. As mentioned at the start, my and Jacob's hearts were connected (and still are). The week of April 6, 2018 was also Easter week, thus it was a holiday from school for me, as a teacher. As a family, we were at the height of busyness with our children's activities and we were running on adrenaline. Our household was full nervous energy and excitement for the series against Nipawin. It was an incredibly exciting, but grueling week of hockey. The very early morning of April 6, I woke up at around 5 a.m. with a start, thinking, "I have to polish Jacob's dress shoes". I don't believe that I had ever polished his shoes before, but for some reason that morning, I felt the need to do so, and so I did. They were the shoes that I bought him for his graduation the year before. As the mom of '19 year old Jacob', my role was to feed him and to cheer him on at hockey games and in life. That week, I had time to fill the fridge and pantry full and I had time to cook for my family, fueling Jacob for games and practices. I had purchased these beautiful, perfectly ripened strawberries and offered to send some with him for the trip. I hadn't seen Jacob off to his games to wish him well or to pack him snacks many times his last year because I was usually at work. I washed the strawberries, packed them in a sandwich-sized Ziploc bag, and gave them to him in the entrance of our home as he headed out the door. Both Kurt and I were able to hug and kiss him, and tell him, "I love you, good luck and see you at the game". I watched him go into his car and drive out the driveway down the street until I could no longer see his car. I am grateful for our farewell to each other. This is a scene that I replay in my head over and over again.

Later that afternoon, Kurt, our 15 year old daughter, Kiana, and I picked up Kurt's father (in Humboldt), our friend in Lake Lenore and Kurt's uncle in Melfort and headed to the game in Nipawin. The rest is history. We came upon the accident scene shortly after it occurred and witnessed what resembled a scene from out of a movie - another scene that I've played over in my head a thousand times. Eventually, we made it back home to our 17 year old Isaac, who was worked his shift at the movie theatre until 8 p.m. that night, knowing something awful had happened to his brother. Our 12 year old, Karysa was home alone with a friend watching movies. I called some of my friends to look after them until we got home with the news. Upon our arrival home, shortly after midnight, I took Karysa, her friend and her friend's mom into our bedroom and sat on the edge of the bed to say, "Jacob died in an accident tonight". I watched my daughter and her little friend freeze with looks of confusion and ask, "Really?" As this was happening, my husband Kurt, went to the basement, where Isaac and Jacob each have a room, and I heard my son cry out with pain yelling, "No!" No one slept that night. We moved beds, taking turns sleeping in Jacob's bedroom. I held a frightened Kiana. In time, we learned that she couldn't sleep because she was afraid, imagining that Jacob lay in the bitter cold snow, alive and waiting for help all through the night.

Today, I see my husband, whose heartstrings were also connected to Jacob's through their common interests. I see him working hard at reestablishing his footing and continuing to love generously every day, while retreating at times to cry silently and privately for his own loss.

I see my brilliant second-born son, Isaac, struggling to finish his Grade 12 year, as he comes to grips with the loss of his only brother.

I see my oldest daughter, Kiana, who was most like Jacob in many ways, who trained with him the previous summer and was supposed to train with him and his buddies this past summer. They both took fitness very seriously and encouraged each other to be their best athletic selves. When Jacob returned to live at home in 2017, Kiana followed his every move and hung on his every word. I see her searching to find where she fits in all of this now.

I see my youngest daughter, Karysa, resilient in her innocence and youth. I also see her compensating, by being overly pleasant at times, trying to spare each family member from our grief while struggle with our own emotional battles.

I see my aging parents and in-laws, sad for the loss of their grandson and sad for us, their own children and grandchildren. They were instrumental in raising our children. Next to God, their grandchildren are the epicenter of their lives.

I see Jacob's cousins, friends, girlfriend, our friends, our community mourn the loss of a bright light - and it hurts. More than 15 kids in 2 provinces between the ages of 4 to 20 are wearing #11 in memory of Jacob.

I hurt. I hurt like I've never hurt before. I cry. When I quieten my mind, I know he is ok. I am grateful for having been given Jacob for 19 years on earth.

Moving forward, mental health will be the biggest battle for each of us affected. I am the mother, I am the wife, I am the daughter. I am responsible for many people, including myself. It's a tall order.

After April 6th, I was unable to return to my work as an elementary school teacher and vice-principal in Humboldt and I was granted a FTE sick leave. In the fall, I returned to work 60% FTE, continuing with a 40% sick leave. After Christmas, I returned to work 80% FTE, with a 20% sick leave. My work is my passion, my passion is my work. I've consulted with my family medical physician and naturopath, needing medication and supplements to help me sleep. I have seen a psychologist and counsellor and received physiotherapy, acupuncture and massage therapy for tension and a locked jaw. I have sought advice from my parish priest. My faith in God allows my family, friends and work to keep me going; without them, I would not be able to move forward.

This is what I posted on Facebook the night of Tuesday, January 8 upon learning of Mr. Sidhu's guilty plea:

Death is part of life. Some choices aren't ours to make, while others are. We don't see or know the bigger picture (my dad's words) and so I choose to BELIEVE that the bigger picture is so amazing that it is unimaginable. I choose to have FAITH in that the bigger picture is LOVE. When I am able to clear my head from all of the noise ... I know. I know that I have a gritty, cheeky, shining winger by my side who will guide my loved ones and me.

Jacob chose not to hold grudges and he chose to learn from his mistakes.

I choose FORGIVENESS. I choose to work at forgiving others and myself.

I choose to work at finding PEACE and to do my humble part at creating it.

There is BEAUTY in all of this. We've witnessed it over and over and over again.

Unfortunately, this is also political, therefore, attention and energy must be given to this, too. It is a mistake that the trucking industry is not held to a higher standard across the country and that our federal and provincial governments aren't jumping all over this to change the laws (in a much more significant way). We must learn from our mistakes. There are excellent truck drivers on the roads, whom we rely on, who are taking a bad wrap for all those who are inexperienced, untrained and allowed to drive. It is time for change and change doesn't happen on its own. I choose to fight for change.

I choose to find purpose in all of this. I choose to do my part to create positive change in the world and to cherish all things good that exist. I choose to be thankful for all that I have. I choose to have HOPE. I choose to LIVE.



The pictures that accompanied the post.

Mr. Sidhu, just as I keep all of these families in my constant prayers, so shall I keep you in mine.

I, Celeste Leray-Leicht, mother of Jacob Leicht am searching for purpose in this. Through education, to honour my son and my family, I will do my part to create opportunities for children to "build relationships, make connections and serve others". I have created a "Northern Lights Movement for Kids" that I am in the process of sharing in as many schools as I can across this province and perhaps into our neighboring provinces. I choose to believe that Jacob's human life on earth was complete. His life, however, is not over, it's just different. He has continued to amaze me and I know he will continue to do so. I have included the attachments with "My Purpose" and the "Northern Lights Movement For Kids" action plan to show my belief that through God's graces, like 29 others, Jacob will humbly astound the world by changing it one heart at a time.

Thank you.